

LETTER FROM **THIS OLD HOUSE**

The Best-Laid Landscape Plans

by Roger Cook

Think of your yard as just another room of the house. In fact, it may be the most used and versatile space you have. You use it as an entrance, for entertaining, for recreation, and for relaxation. On top of that, a well-thought-out and well-maintained landscape adds to the overall value of your property.

In this issue you'll get some great ideas for planning the perfect landscape (page 94). Unfortunately, when people are remodeling, too often I hear, "We had set aside money for the landscaping, but we decided to do granite kitchen countertops and radiant heat. Now we don't have anything left." The landscape plan becomes an afterthought, and all the attention is showered on the house itself. Homeowners often justify this with "But we want it to look *beautiful!*" Yet what they end up with is a grade-A renovation inside and a D-plus landscape, which detracts from the great renovation that they've spent so much time on. After months of trucks and construction crews coming and going, the lawn is inevitably a mess, sorely in need of a fix-up. How nice is even the most beautiful house if the yard looks scraggly, bald, and muddy?

The only way to get around this is to be sure to include your "outdoor room" in your overall budget. Consider exactly what would make the space look wonderful (or at least decent) and set aside a realistic amount. You can consult with a landscape contractor, landscape designer, or landscape architect to help you estimate the costs. Then—and this is the most important thing—don't touch that money until the appropriate time, when the house is finished and you're ready to turn your attention to the yard.

If you plan ahead, you can have a completed project that makes you smile every time you're outside. In the warm months, you'll spend more time in this "room" than in any other. And visitors to your new home will get their first glimpse of the care you put into the whole place as soon as they come down the driveway. Besides, when was the last time you played catch with the kids on the granite countertop or had a cookout on the radiant heat? ■



TOH landscape contractor Roger Cook suggests budgeting for landscape work at the start of a house remodel—and leaving the yard untouched until you're ready to work outside.

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